

Old Standard Vote Expected Today

Commissioners Say They Need No More Information to Make Decision

Jefferson County Commissioners again discussed the Old Standard Quarry rezoning proposal during last Thursday's meeting. A motion by Commissioner Jim Surkamp to deny the rezoning request and all future re-zoning requests did not have a second; however, when the motion was limited to the Old Standard, Rusty Morgan quickly seconded. On advice of counsel, James Casimiro, who told commissioners that the item was not properly on their agenda to be voted on, the group decided to hold off the vote to today's meeting.

Rusty Morgan, who had, at the last meeting held June 28, called for much more time to study the project and all of the information, told those in attendance that "I have completely changed my mind." Morgan went on to praise the attributes of the proposal, saying the project had merit; however, he said "As a community, we can do a whole lot better."

He followed by saying that while the components proposed by Old Standard LLC, including a hotel, conference center, professional office space and a riverside park, are things the county needs, there must be another way to bring jobs to the county, but not on this battlefield.

Many opponents of the project have voiced concern over the project being constructed on property that is adjacent to the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Park Ranger Dennis Frye, on a tour given to interested parties, pointed out that soldiers had traversed the land during the Civil War.

The National Park, which outlined a plan for their expansion in 2004, failed to recognize the Old Standard Quarry site at that time as being historically significant. Reports have shown that the park did not include the parcel in their "wish list" of properties and made no effort to acquire the property.

Commissioner Frances Morgan, who has not made any indication of how her vote will fall on this important issue, said last week that the commissioners must vote on the rezoning as it was submitted. She said that "offerings of covenants and conditions is a distraction" to the commissioners.

Commissioners Dale Manuel and Greg Corliss disagreed with the discussion and the rush for a vote on the rezoning. Corliss said that by rushing the vote, the commission is not allowing staff to fully assess the proposal, including conditional zoning or covenants which can be placed on the property.

Developers have already provided compromises to the commissioners on the proposed project, including scaling down from 27 buildings to 17; adding a golf course; and working to make the project environmentally sound.

They have agreed to be part of The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and operators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings' performance. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

At the June 28 meeting, commissioners instructed planning staffer Tony Redmond to reconsider the re-zoning proposal and to look at the conditions which could be imposed on the project; however at last week's meeting, the consensus of three of the commissioners was to ignore the proposed development and any restrictions which could be placed on it and vote simply on a petition to rezone.

Developer Herb Jonkers said that the issue is not a yes or no on development on the property. Currently, 80 acres of the property are zoned residential and could be home to up to 1600 housing units. The other part of the property was zoned rural in 1988; however, it was zoned industrial prior to that, and according to Jonkers, State Law says it can then be used for industrial again, despite local zoning laws.

Commissioners Frances Morgan and Rusty Morgan both said last week that they need no more information to make their decision. In fact, when asked by Corliss if they would continue to gather information, they said they do not want any more information. According to information from the business community and confirmed by the commission office, hundreds of signatures of county residents have come to the county this week in favor of the proposal which will offer a commercial tax base and other benefits for the county. Letters of opposition have also been adding up; however, many of those appear to be from out of state individuals.